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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**CONVERGENCE AND EXPLOITATION:
TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME, TERRORISM AND THE THREAT TO
AMERICA**

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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18 May 2015

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Paper Abstract

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, America has been fighting terrorist organizations on the distant battlefields of the Middle East and Africa. Yet, increasingly, these terrorist organizations are operating in the western hemisphere. Terrorist groups like Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, ISIS, and the FARC are working with Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) groups throughout the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM areas of responsibility (AOR). The danger is that Latin American TOCs like the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas, control the lucrative smuggling pipelines that span North, Central and South America. These land, sea and air illicit pipelines transit humans, drugs and weapons into the United States on a daily basis. Could terrorist organizations use these same pipelines to attack the United States? Have the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM AORs become strategic blind spots from which a terrorist could initiate another September 11th? This paper will demonstrate the growing nexus of TOCs and terrorist organizations in Latin America, the States that support, harbor and profit from this nexus and the threat this nexus poses to the United States. It will also offer recommendations to address this growing national security concern.

Introduction

In 2015 the United States faces extraordinary security challenges worldwide. China's development of a blue-water navy and aggression in the East and South China Seas and North Korea's constant saber rattling are just a couple of many reasons why the Obama administration has decided to conduct a "pivot" towards the Asia-Pacific. The Middle-East continues to burn with the instability caused by Syria's and Iraq's battle against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) as well as Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon, a regional proxy war with Saudi Arabia on the battlefields of Yemen, withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and Arab-Israeli tension over Palestinian Statehood, to name a few. America's European allies are dealing with a Cold War-like resurgence of Russian violence in Ukraine and Africa is struggling through instability from the Arab Spring and terrorism. Certainly, the combatant commanders in U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), European Command (EUCOM) and Africa Command (AFRICOM) are busy engaging the Nation's adversaries, but what about Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)?

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), Islamic and leftist terrorist organizations and state governments hostile towards the United States are becoming an increasing threat to the U.S. homeland. Similar to the relationship among Al Qaeda (AQ), the Taliban and Pakistan in 2001, terrorist organizations are working with TOCs in the ungoverned spaces of Latin America, sometimes harbored and supported by nations in pursuit of a new world order. Air, land, and sea smuggling pipelines from Mexico, Central and South America have been used to traffic illicit drugs and people into the United States for decades. Could terrorist organizations use these same pathways to smuggle weapons and terrorists for attacks in the

United States? Have the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM areas of responsibility (AOR) become strategic blind spots for America's enemies to exploit? Increasingly, evidence is pointing to, "yes." In his March 2015 testimony before Congress, the SOUTHCOM Commander noted that Latin American smuggling networks are "so efficient that if a terrorist, or almost anyone, wants to get into our country, they just pay the fare."¹ This expanding relationship between terrorist organizations and Latin American TOCs, shielded and supported by anti-U.S. regimes, is providing lucrative illicit funding and avenues of approach that could enable a terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

Background

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, global stability as a result of a bi-polar world has disintegrated. Today, the United States is the lone superpower ensuring global stability. In February 2015, James Clapper, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, gave an opening statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee as a pretext to his Worldwide Threat Assessment. He noted that "the year 2014 saw the highest rate of political instability since 1992, the most deaths as a result of state-sponsored mass killings since the early 1990's, and the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons, or IDPs, since WWII."² Despite ongoing efforts to counter worldwide terrorism, Mr. Clapper stated that there were more terrorism related deaths in 2014 than any of the previous 45 years of record keeping.³ Mexico, the land bridge between the United States and Central and South America, has large

¹ William Gortney and John Kelly, "Testimony," Senate, *Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services to Receive Testimony on U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2016 and the Future Years Defense Program*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015, accessed 23 March 2015, ProQuest, 22.

² James R. Clapper, "Testimony," Senate, *Opening Statement to Worldwide Threat Assessment Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015, accessed 22 March 2015, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/testimonies/209-congressional-testimonies-2015/1175-dni-clapper-opening-statement-on-the-worldwide-threat-assessment-before-the-senate-armed-services-committee>.

³ Ibid.

sections of its territory under the control of TOC groups like the Sinaloa and Los Zetas cartels. Heavily involved in drug trafficking, these TOCs battle for control of the lucrative smuggling pipelines into the United States and even overseas. As the SOUTHCOM Commander General Kelly noted in his March 2015 Posture Statement, “these networks could unwittingly, or even wittingly, facilitate the movement of terrorist operatives or weapons of mass destruction toward our border, potentially undetected and almost completely unrestricted.”⁴ A weakened United States, unable to disrupt this burgeoning black market economy, is not only in the business interest of these dangerous TOCs but also in the best interest of adversarial nations seeking to reduce U.S. influence abroad. Islamic radicalism (from both state and non-state actors), Leftist organizations and Transnational Organized Crime all have incentive to work together to erode U.S. hegemony and establish their own regional dominance. This paper will highlight instances of these developing networks among the following actors:

The Terrorist Organizations

Hezbollah. A Shia terrorist organization with long-known ties to Iran.

Al Qaeda and Associated Movements. Sunni terrorist organization with associated franchises throughout the world.

ISIS and Affiliates. Sunni terrorist organization which established a self-described caliphate across Syria and Iraq in 2014.

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Communist terrorist organization established to overthrow the government of Colombia.

⁴ John Kelly, “Testimony,” Senate, *Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps Commander, United States Southern Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015, accessed 23 March 2015, ProQuest, 5.

Relevant Anti-U.S. States

Iran. Since 1979, Iran has been ruled by an Islamic authoritarian regime that has exported terror and pursued the possession of a nuclear weapon.

“Bolivarian Alliance.”⁵ The Socialist alliance of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Ecuador which seeks to expel U.S. influence from South America.⁶

Transnational Organized Crime Groups

Mexican Drug Cartels. Violent Transnational Organized Crime groups like the Juarez, Sinoloa and the Los Zetas cartels who control the smuggling routes into the United States.

Now, the evidence to support the terror and TOC nexus in Latin America will be revealed. This author acknowledges that this is not an all-inclusive list of terrorist organizations, transnational organized crime groups, or anti-U.S. countries whose convergence pose a threat to U.S. national security. Also of note, the author wishes to recognize that using only unclassified information to describe the nexus likely does not paint a complete picture of the linkages or the threat.

The Hezbollah and Iranian Nexus

Lebanese Hezbollah was formed after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and has been attacking U.S. and Israeli targets ever since.⁷ Known attacks attributed to Hezbollah include the suicide truck bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April 1983, the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983 and the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut in September

⁵ Douglas Farah, “Testimony,” House, *A Line in the Sand: Assessing Dangerous Threats to Our Nation’s Borders: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management of the Committee on Homeland Security*, 112th Cong., 2nd sess., 2012, accessed 16 March 2015, ProQuest, 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ National Counterterrorism Center, “Counterterrorism Guide: Hizballah,” accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/hizballah.html>.

1984.⁸ Today, Hezbollah's reach and funding are global. Its increasing footprint in Latin America is troublesome.

Professor Celina Realuyo of the National Defense University describes Hezbollah as a highly organized and business savvy terror group that relies on its global partners for funding and support of its illicit and terrorist activities.⁹ Certainly, a large amount of Hezbollah's global terror campaign has been funded by its illicit dealing in Latin America. In the Tri-Border Area, the remote and mostly ungoverned region along the borders of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, Hezbollah is thriving. Realuyo explains that Hezbollah operations out of the Tri-Border area earn about \$20 million a year.¹⁰ However, using a vast network of Lebanese diaspora, over 8 million Lebanese in Brazil and Argentina alone, Hezbollah operatives easily blend into the population throughout Latin America.¹¹

Hezbollah's activity in Latin America is not a recent phenomenon. Two prominent incidents of Hezbollah terror activities occurred in Argentina in the 1990s. They have been attributed with the bombings of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and of the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (AMIA) Jewish Community Center in 1994.¹² High-ranking Iranian and Argentinian officials are also reported to have been involved in the Jewish Community Center attack. This alleged convergence of Hezbollah with senior Iranian and Argentinian officials has been investigated ever since. One of the investigators, Alberto Nisman, a prominent Argentinian prosecutor, was found dead in his Buenos Aires apartment on January 18, 2015 of an apparent suicide. Later that same day, Mr. Nisman was

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Celina Realuyo, "The Terror Crime Nexus: Hezbollah's Global Facilitators," *Prism* 5, no. 1 (2014): 118, http://cco.dodlive.mil/files/2014/09/prism_5-1.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹¹ Maronite Foundation, "Lebanese in the World," accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.maronitefoundation.org/lebanesediaspora.html>.

¹² Realuyo, "The Terror Crime Nexus," 119.

scheduled to go public with his 350 page report on the AMIA bombing, which would have unveiled the role of senior Iranian officials on the attack and the lengths to which Argentinian President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, went to cover up the Iranian involvement. Suspiciously, an autopsy of Mr. Nisman's body showed that he had been shot in the back of the head and did not have a gun powder burn on either of his hands. This led Mr. Nisman's family to believe that the apparent suicide was actually murder.¹³

More recently, the 2008 Operation Titan provided hard evidence of the nexus between Hezbollah and drug trafficking organizations (DTO). As detailed in the U.S. House Subcommittee Majority Report in November 2012, the combined United States and Colombian operation discovered that the Lebanese facilitator, Chekri Mahmoud Harb, along with many others, created a vast cocaine smuggling and money-laundering network that yielded hundreds of millions of dollars annually; 12 percent of those profits went to Hezbollah.¹⁴

Another revealing instance of Hezbollah activity in Latin America is the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control's report and U.S. Federal prosecutor's indictment of Ayman Joumaa. Joumaa was indicted for his role in the trafficking and sale of tons of South American cocaine. He was also indicted for laundering hundreds of millions of dollars of drug profits from deals transiting the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁵ The federal indictment alleges that

¹³ BBC, "Nisman Family say Argentina Prosecutor was Murdered," *BBC.com*, 5 March 2015, accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31757878>.

¹⁴ Chris Kraul and Sebastian Rotella, "Colombia Drug Ring May Link to Hezbollah," *Seattle Times*, 25 October 2008, accessed 9 May 2015, <http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/colombia-drug-ring-may-link-to-hezbollah/>, cited in House Committee on Homeland Security, *A Line in the Sand: Countering Crime, Violence and Terror at the Southwest Border, Majority Report by the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management*, 112th Cong., 2nd sess., 2012, 8.

¹⁵ Press Release, "Treasury Targets Major Lebanese-Based Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering Network," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, 26 January 2011, accessed 9 May 2015, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1035.aspx>, cited in House Committee on Homeland Security, *A Line in the Sand*, 8.

Joumaa, Hezbollah and the Mexican TOC group Los Zetas worked together to transfer Colombian cocaine through Central America, Mexico and into the United States.¹⁶ Douglas Farah, a renowned expert on the convergence of terror groups and TOCs in Latin America, testified before Congress that the case against Joumaa highlights a grave threat to U.S. national security. In response to the subcommittee's majority report mentioned above, Farah testified that the State protection provided to these well-trained organizations in the western hemisphere presents the United States a more dangerous threat to its borders than it has ever faced.¹⁷

Finally, the uncovering of the 2011 Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir is one of the most glaring examples of the TOC and terror nexus. Manssor Arbabsiar is a dual U.S. - Iranian citizen from Texas. According to U.S. authorities, Arbabsiar and members of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) planned to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador by bombing a restaurant al-Jubeir was known to frequent. Arbabsiar and the IRGC-QF also planned to bomb the Saudi Arabian and Israeli Embassies in Washington D.C.¹⁸ The conspirators attempted to hire a member of the Mexican cartel Los Zetas to carry out the assassination in exchange for several tons of opium from the Middle East. However, the plotters did not realize that the Los Zetas member they were trying to hire was, in fact, an agent of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.¹⁹ Although the plot was foiled, this example highlights the willingness

¹⁶ *U.S. v Ayman Joumaa*, US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Case#1:11-CR-00560-TSE, cited in House Committee on Homeland Security, *A Line in the Sand*, 9.

¹⁷ Farah, *A Line in the Sand*, 1.

¹⁸ John Rollins and Liana Sun Wyler, *Terrorism and Transnational Crime: Foreign Policy Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of Iranian sponsors to work with TOCs in Latin America to carry out attacks in the United States.

The Al Qaeda and Associated Movements Nexus

Al Qaeda, the Sunni terrorist organization best known for its execution of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, is a global terrorist franchise with aspirations to destroy America, her interests and her people. Founded in 1988 after the successful jihad (or Muslim holy war) against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Usama bin Laden (UBL) and other mujahidin leaders created al Qaeda (or “the base”) to continue the jihad globally. In 1996 UBL, the emir or prince of al Qaeda, publically issued a fatwa (holy Islamic duty) calling for a jihad against “Westerners” in Islamic lands, citing the United States specifically as a main aggressor.²⁰ Four years after UBL’s death, the al Qaeda franchise continues its global jihad under the leadership of Ayman al Zawahiri. One of these al Qaeda franchises with links to Latin America is al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operating from North and West Africa.

The profits from the Latin American drug trade are helping to fuel AQ’s global terror network. Several examples of this relationship are listed in a December 2013 report from the U.S. Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control. According to the report, authorities in Mali linked cocaine and marijuana trafficking in West Africa to a member of AQIM.²¹ In 2009, Ghana arrested three West African AQ associates for their intent to transport cocaine

²⁰ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 48.

²¹ David Brown, *The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa*, Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2013), cited in Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, *Eight Steps to Counter the Drug Trade in West Africa*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., 2013, 17.

and support AQIM and the FARC.²² SOUTHCOM Commander General Kelly's speech at the National Defense University further supports the link between AQ and Latin American drug cartels. In an October 2014 Breitbart online article which discusses his speech, General Kelly explains that the cocaine coming out of Bolivia and Peru "moves through West Africa, up the Maghreb and into Western Europe--al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliates take a fair share, some amount of money, we don't know how much, but a lot of money to allow it to flow."²³ He then mentions the claim by the French version of the DEA which states "Latin American cartel operations in West Africa are 'literally funding al Qaeda.'"²⁴ The article also explains that the Sinaloa and Los Zetas Cartels are the TOCs responsible for the international trafficking of these drugs.²⁵

An online article from *The Telegraph* in January 2013 describes the dangerous convergence of Latin American TOCs, AQ and drugs in West Africa. The article cites a November 2012 court case in New York which details how members of an AQ affiliate extradited from Mali attempted to buy and transport cocaine from an FBI agent posing as a Latin American cartel member.²⁶ A DEA agent familiar with the case said that even though the accused denied their terrorist affiliations after they were caught, it "proved a direct link between terrorist organizations and international drug trafficking."²⁷

²² Thomas Harrigan, "Testimony," Senate, *Countering Narcotics Threats in West Africa: Hearing before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control*, 112th Cong., 2nd sess., 2012, cited in Senate Caucus, *Eight Steps*, 17.

²³ Edwin Mora, "U.S. General: Al Qaeda Working with Latin American Drug Cartels," accessed 20 March 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/10/08/u-s-general-al-qaeda-working-with-latin-american-drug-cartels/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Colin Freeman, "Revealed: How Saharan Caravans of Cocaine Help to Fund Al-Qaeda in Terrorists' North African Domain," accessed 23 March 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/mali/9829099/Revealed-how-Saharan-caravans-of-cocaine-help-to-fund-al-Qaeda-in-terrorists-North-African-domain.html>.

²⁷ Ibid.

This article also describes a 2009 incident that reveals how some of these drugs are trafficked from South America to West Africa. For example, abandoned out in the deserts of Mali, authorities discovered an old Boeing 727 that the United Nations Office for Drug Control believes was flown directly from Venezuela to Mali with 11 tons of cocaine. The now infamous “Cocaine Air” incident is believed to have uncovered just one of an entire fleet of drug trafficking planes used by the Latin American Cartels.²⁸ Since these TOC/terror networks have proved immensely profitable, cartel leaders have sought out new relationships with organizations who want to reap the benefits of this illicit trade--new organizations like ISIS.

The ISIS and Affiliates Nexus

ISIS has exploited the civil war in Syria and instability within Iraq to supplant al Qaeda as the preeminent global Sunni terrorist organization. Led by the self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, ISIS has conquered territory in Syria and Iraq and established the first caliphate since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War One. With its adroit use of social media to permeate its message, ISIS has capitalized on twenty-first century cyber technologies to appeal to and radicalize young Muslims around the world. ISIS’ recent rise to relevance on the international stage has influenced other terrorist organizations to swear allegiance, like former al Qaeda affiliate Boko Haram in Nigeria.²⁹ ISIS’ anti-U.S. fervor, growing capability and recent inroads into Latin America are troubling.

In a Judicial Watch report from April 2015, an unnamed Mexican Army Officer and Federal Police Inspector revealed that ISIS members are conducting operations along the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Scott Neuman, “Boko Haram Reportedly Swears Allegiance to the Islamic State,” *NPR.com*, 7 March 2015, accessed 14 May 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/03/07/391519545/boko-haram-reportedly-swears-allegiance-to-the-islamic-state>.

Mexico, Texas and New Mexico border. The Mexican sources told Judicial Watch that ISIS is working with the Juarez cartel members known as “coyotes.” These cartel affiliates, skilled in human smuggling, can infiltrate the southern U.S. border with near impunity at locations where there is an established drug-smuggling pipeline. The sources describe how ISIS members are believed to be working with the Juarez coyotes to conduct reconnaissance on U.S. military facilities like Fort Bliss and White Sands Missile Range, as well as area universities, government facilities and power generating facilities.³⁰ Both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Mexican Government have denied the content of these claims, but Representative Duncan Hunter of California has revealed similar findings.

In an October 2014 interview, Rep. Hunter told Fox News that he is aware “that at least 10 ISIS fighters have been caught coming across the Mexican border in Texas,”³¹ citing a U.S. Border Patrol source. Although a DHS spokesman denies this claim as well, Representative Hunter stands by his comments. He went on to say that even though these ISIS members were apprehended, “there’s going to be dozens more that did not get caught by the Border Patrol.”³² A Texas Law Enforcement Bulletin obtained by Fox News in August 2014 seems to corroborate these claims. The unclassified report states that “social media account holders believed to be ISIS militants and propagandists have called for unspecified border operations, or they have sought to raise awareness that illegal entry through Mexico is

³⁰ Judicial Watch, “ISIS Camp a Few Miles from Texas, Mexican Authorities Confirm,” *The Judicial Watch Blog*, 14 April 2015, accessed 14 April 2015, <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2015/04/isis-camp-a-few-miles-from-texas-mexican-authorities-confirm/>.

³¹ Judson Berger, Jennifer Griffin, and William La Jeunesse, “Congressman: ‘At Least 10 ISIS Fighters’ Caught Trying to Cross into US,” *Foxnews.com*, 8 October 2014, accessed 20 April 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/10/08/congressman-at-least-10-isis-fighters-caught-trying-to-cross-into-us/>.

³² Ibid.

a viable option.”³³ In General Kelly’s SOUTHCOM Posture Statement before Congress in March 2015, he cites the same Texas Law Enforcement Bulletin, underscoring the very real threat of ISIS’ exploitation of the Mexican smuggling pipelines.³⁴

The FARC Nexus

The FARC has been a U.S. designated terrorist organization since an incident in 1997 when FARC members kidnapped and executed seven American missionaries.³⁵ However, the FARC has been fighting in South America for over 50 years. Established in 1964 as the military wing of a Communist organization for the overthrow of the Colombian government, the FARC has been committing terrorist acts against U.S. allies and interests for decades.³⁶

Colombia has made tremendous progress neutralizing FARC within its borders, yet the FARC persists. Today, the leftist terrorist organization is finding refuge in the Bolivarian States, particularly within Venezuela where U.S. relations are an all-time low. In fact, foreign relations have become so poor that in March of 2015, President Obama declared Venezuela a “national security threat” and ordered sanctions against some of its regime members.³⁷ Senator Marco Rubio pointed out in his Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Venezuela that even though its oil deposits make it one of the richest countries in South America, terrible social, political and economic policy has driven the country nearer to economic collapse. Yet, the country’s leadership deflects the blame for the worsening

³³ Jana Winter, “Online Posts Show ISIS Eyeing Mexican Border, Says Law Enforcement Bulletin,” *Foxnews.com*, 29 August 2014, accessed 20 April 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/08/29/online-posts-show-isis-eyeing-mexican-border-says-law-enforcement-bulletin/>.

³⁴ Kelly, “Testimony,” Senate, *Posture Statement*.

³⁵ Douglas Farah, “Testimony,” House, *Terrorist Groups in Latin America: The Changing Landscape: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., 2014, accessed 27 March 2015, ProQuest, 2.

³⁶ National Counterterrorism Center, “Counterterrorism Guide: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC),” accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/farc.html>.

³⁷ Mark Piggott, “US President Obama Declares Venezuela a ‘National Security Threat,’” *International Business Times: UK Edition*, 9 March 2015, accessed 22 March 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/us-president-obama-declares-venezuela-national-security-threat-1491211>.

conditions onto America. Venezuela's President Maduro has been rallying his people against the United States, blaming their hyper-inflation and poverty on America. He also claims that the United States plans to invade Venezuela, perhaps as a red herring to explain his closer ties with Iran, Russia, China and the FARC.³⁸ In Douglas Farah's testimony at the same hearing he noted that evidence captured during an operation to kill a FARC commander in 2008 showed a direct link to Venezuela's former President Hugo Chavez and members of his cabinet, to include the current President Maduro.³⁹ Alarming, Venezuela's own military doctrine states the practicality of using a WMD against the United States. Clearly, a U.S. national security threat exists when a hybrid TOC/terrorist organization like the FARC establishes ties with a nation like Venezuela—a country whose leaders believe that using a WMD against the United States is sound military strategy.⁴⁰

The FARC's illicit ties to other TOCs and anti-U.S. regimes go well beyond Venezuela. Douglas Farah explains that the FARC “remains at the center of a multitude of criminal enterprises and terrorist activities that stretch from Colombia south to Argentina, and northward to Central America and into direct ties to the Mexican drug cartels primarily the Sinaloa organization.”⁴¹ Elaborating, he describes the FARC as the glue that binds together a Latin American revolutionary movement of armed groups, terrorist organizations, the Bolivarian Alliance and Iran. This revolutionary political movement has formed under the common purpose of weakening or even destroying the United States.⁴²

³⁸ Marco Rubio, “Testimony,” Senate, *Politics and Economy in Venezuela: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues of the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015, accessed 25 March 2015, ProQuest, 1-3.

³⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁴¹ Farah, “Testimony,” House, *Changing Landscape*, 2.

⁴² Ibid., 4.

Economically, the Mexican cartels have figured out that it makes sense to work directly with the FARC rather than through intermediaries. An InSight Crime study on Mexican Drug Cartels found that cocaine trade profits increase about 50 percent when they get the product directly from the source instead of trafficking it through Mexico.⁴³ Producing approximately 90 percent of the cocaine trafficked into the United States and two-thirds of the world's supply, Mexican cartels and other TOCs and terror groups have an enormous financial incentive to strengthen ties with the FARC terrorists.⁴⁴ The FARC find the relationship tremendously profitable as well. Douglas Farah best summarizes this quid pro quo relationship:

The FARC needs to move cocaine to U.S. and European markets in order to obtain the money necessary to maintain its army of some 9,000 troops. In order to do that, the FARC, with the help of traditional drug trafficking organizations, must move its product through Central America and Mexico to the United States—the same route used by those who want to move illegal aliens to the United States, and those who want to move bulk cash shipments, stolen cars, and weapons from the United States southward. All of these goods traverse the same territory, pass through the same gatekeepers, and are often interchangeable along the way. A kilo of cocaine can be traded for roughly one ton of AK-47 assault rifles before either of the goods reaches what would normally be its final destination.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most dangerous convergence of all is the link between Venezuela, Iran and uranium--the raw material required for a nuclear weapon. A 2009 New York Times article discussed how Iran was working with Venezuela to find and test Venezuelan uranium reserves. The article also cites a Venezuelan deal with Russia to pursue a Venezuelan nuclear energy project. Then President Hugo Chavez denied any attempts to subvert nuclear sanctions on Iran or pursue a nuclear weapons program himself, yet, the

⁴³ In Sight Crime, "Mexico," accessed 17 March 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/mexico>.

⁴⁴ Douglas Farah, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press), 2012, 16-17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

potential for nefarious activity in this situation should raise an eyebrow.⁴⁶ The specter of Venezuela obtaining enough nuclear material for a tactical nuclear weapon, with close friends like the FARC and their extensive smuggling networks into the United States, is a grave concern.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The nexus of transnational organized crime and terrorist organizations in Latin America is clear. This dangerous relationship must not be allowed to metastasize in the western hemisphere any more than it already has. First and foremost, Congress must find a way to end sequestration and unleash the resources necessary for the Departments of Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), Energy (DOE), Treasury (DOT) and other agencies to confront this growing issue. Senator John McCain explored this issue of sequestration in his March 2015 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing with the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM commanders. When asked about the effect fiscal year 2016 sequestration would have on SOUTHCOM's ability to meet the problems in Latin America, General Kelly bluntly responded that "we could be talking defeat if sequestration happens."⁴⁷ With Senator McCain's statement that the Mexican cartel networks stretch to at least "1,200 American cities,"⁴⁸ sequestration cuts to the aforementioned agencies would severely limit their ability to monitor, disrupt and interdict the cartels' illicit pipelines outside and inside the United States.

Second, U.S. intelligence agencies must increasingly focus their resources in the SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM AORs. In Admiral Gortney's testimony before Congress in

⁴⁶ Simon Romero, "Venezuela Says Iran is Helping it Look for Uranium," *New York Times*, accessed 5 May 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/americas/26venez.html?_r=0.

⁴⁷ Gortney and Kelly, "Testimony," Senate, *U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command*, 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

March 2015, he stated that to attack the United States, the enemy would likely exploit the seams between combatant command AORs and friendly nations. He described the enemy situation on the U.S. southern border to be so flexible and adaptive that he made the correlation to water--if you stop the leak in one seam, the enemy, like water, would simply find another path to the United States.⁴⁹ Near one of these seams between NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM resides the U.S. Joint Task Force – Bravo (JTF-B) in Honduras. In an April 15, 2015 interview with a former U.S. Army forces commander within JTF-B, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Jay Liddick described the theater as an “economy of force AOR” where maintaining partnerships and building capacity which ensure pressure on all the enemy pipelines that transit Latin America was a concern.⁵⁰ This is why intelligence is so vital to disrupting any planned terrorist use of these existing pipelines. U.S. forces, U.S. interagency partners and U.S. allies cannot hope to monitor, block or interdict all illicit smuggling routes at the same time. Intelligence resources that leverage American technological advantages and global human intelligence networks must be increased.

Third, the United States must increase aid and security cooperation within Mexico to defeat the violent TOCs that control the smuggling pipelines into the United States. Groups like the Juarez, Sinoloa and Los Zetas cartels have amassed power and influence through the profitable illicit drug industry that has destabilized communities in the United States and threatened Mexican sovereignty for generations. Now that these TOCs are working with terrorist organizations who wish to attack America, all elements of U.S. national power must be applied to defeat them. Just like the partnership and aid that helped defeat the FARC

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84-85.

⁵⁰ Jay Liddick (U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, KY), interview by author, 15 April 2015.

within Colombia, the United States will need to double its effort to defeat the national security threat from the TOCs operating in Mexico.

Last, the U.S. government must increase efforts to secure the border with Mexico and stem the unfettered flow of illegal aliens entering the United States. As demonstrated previously, Juarez cartel coyotes have a sophisticated human smuggling operation that is allegedly bringing members of ISIS across the border. How many terrorists have already crossed into the United States? Unfortunately, there is no way to know. If the drug cartels have been smuggling drugs, weapons, and people into the United States, how easy would it be to smuggle an armed terrorist or weapon of mass destruction? Nations that wish to maintain their sovereignty must control their borders. Bound by the U.S. Constitution, it is a fundamental duty of the government to provide for the Nation's defense; this must be addressed.

In 1823 President Monroe issued his famous "Monroe Doctrine" which called for the European nations to refrain from meddling in the western hemisphere.⁵¹ As the TOC/terror nexus evolves in Latin America, the United States needs to reinvigorate the Monroe Doctrine to ward off twenty-first century transgressors of American sovereignty. ISIS, al Qaeda, Hezbollah and the FARC all have desires to destroy America. Iran and the Bolivarian States wish to do the same. The convergence of these state and non-state actors in Latin America is a threat to U.S. national security that must not be overlooked.

⁵¹ Our Documents, "Monroe Doctrine (1823)," accessed 8 May 2015, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=23>.

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